

Mixtape by Frankiebee89

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Summary: of course, the first girl Mike meets that doesn't totally suck would end up being his new stepsister. AU, no powers, high school.

1. Chapter 1

Chapter 1

It's loud and crowded, smoking hanging heavy in the air like a fog, as bass thumps and bodies move together on the makeshift dance floor. Michael Wheeler stands off to one side, nursing a warm, red Solo cup of flat keg beer and pretending for the sake of his friends that he's having a good time. It's hot, and loud, and the mass of people here are their classmates and it's hard to act like he cares for them when they're sober. Drunk and high, they are more obnoxious and aggravating than ever.

"Thirty more minutes," Will Byers says in a hushed voice beside him. "Thirty more minutes abs it will be perfectly acceptable to get the hell out of here." Mike nods in total agreement, lifting his cup to take a swig and instantly wincing. This beer is gross - not that he has anything to compare it to, but he can't help but think it has to be better if so many adults drink it.

The fact that they're even here, in Jennifer Hayes' house on Rockwell Drive, in the fancy new subdivision where the houses are big, modern, and boast two or more garages and have swimming pools, makes Mike frown. They weren't popular, by any means. Lucas Sinclair was the only athletic one of their group, football in the fall and baseball in the spring, and that was how they were invited. Lucas wanted to come because of the redheaded new girl, Max Mayfield. She'd shoved a flyer at him after school Friday afternoon, a flirty crooked grin on her face and instructions that he'd better show if he wanted a chance to get in her Calvin Klein's.

Dustin Henderson, the fourth member of what they'd been hatefully dubbed in middle school, the Nerd Herd, was ecstatic at the chance to mingle and maybe try his luck with some girls. Ever since his teeth came in back during freshmen year, he'd been angling at becoming a ladies' man to no luck. He was always optimistic, however, and as they'd rode to Jennifer's Saturday evening in his hand-me-down Station Wagon (lovingly named the Shaggin' Wagon out of his mother's hearing range), Dustin had been overflowing with mirth and cheer.

Usually it was infectious, but Mike was simply not in the mood. He wanted to stay home and lament his mother's impending wedding, meeting the man that was to become his stepfather. Jim Hopper. What kind of a name was that? Nancy was luckily avoiding the mess, all the way in California at Stanford with Steve Harrington, though both would return in the summer for the wedding. It was only a couple months away.

Just thinking about it made him grimace, but he quickly slugged down the rest of his disgusting beer to cover it. "I'm gonna get another," he tells Will, wiggling the cup before turning quickly and losing himself in the crowd.

Sure, Jim seems nice enough. He's a cop, taking over the chief of police position. It was fortunate for him, Mike thinks, that the old chief happened to be retiring at precisely the perfect time. So not only will Mike have a new Dad, but he'll also have a cop hanging around all the time. The thought makes his palms sweat; he's never so much as had a speeding ticket, but he's still antsy around authority figures.

The line for the keg is short and Mike lets some random guy fill it, nodding as he rambles on about the killer party. "It's legendary," he slurs, and Mike frowns but doesn't comment as he takes his cup and moves out to the back deck.

It's late April, and still a bit chilly, but there are even more people out here and smoke longs for some quiet as the familiar pounding in his temples begins. The smoke, the inane, deafening chatter, the obnoxiously loud music, it's all too much and he finds himself longing for bed. His house is always quiet since Ted left, no more screaming matches behind slammed doors, no more car engines rumbling to life in the middle of the night, no more plates smashed against walls... and with Nancy gone, too, there isn't even the distraction of her stereo blasting from down the hall. Mike misses the noise in a way; it took his mind off of things. But now he craves silence, and being alone. He stares into the dark amber beer in his cup with a glum expression, when someone jostles into him and it sloshes over the rim onto his T-shirt.

"Oh no! I'm so sorry!" Then a burst of laughter and hands fumbling

over his chest and stomach, slapping at the wet material and furthering his annoyance. "I'm so sorry. I'm so clumsy."

Mike sucks in a breath, willing the irritation to recede - fuck thirty minutes, he wants to leave now - when his dark gaze lands on the offending person and he sucks in a surprised breath.

It's not one of the typical mouthbreathers from school. In fact, Mike knows that he's never seen her before, as his memory is close to impeccable and she would most certainly have made an impression. Wide, dark brown eyes rimmed in darker liner, beneath a mop of wild, chocolate brown curls that orbit her head like a halo. She's wearing a flannel over a pair of bib-overalls, which would have seemed dorky on anyone else, and dirty white Chucks. Her mouth tilts into a smile as her cheeks turn rosy with blush, and Mike can't remember quite how to breathe.

"Sorry," she says again, after a too long stretch of silence. Mike clicks his mouth shut, shakes away the haze that's settled in his mind.

"It's ok," he says. "Accidents... happen." He sounds like a fourth grader but she doesn't seem to notice, instead nodding and smiling bigger. Wow, he thinks. Wow.

"Sorry. My friend dragged me here - I'm not really into this scene but, when in Rome, right?" She clinks her cup against his almost empty one and then downs the contents, sloppily wiping her sleeve over her mouth. Mike does the same, simply to have something to do with his hands. A girl this pretty has never woken to him, or continued to carry on a conversation with him, and he's flooded with nerves.

"Yeah, um - same. I mean, my friends -" Mike gestures towards the house behind him, as someone whoops and then slams the sliding door. "Dragged me too."

"Max said I have to meet new people," she goes on, one hand ruffling through her hair. "Like, because I'm moving here, and she said that I should get to know my classmates." She rolls her eyes and Mike can barely breathe. Maybe it's the awful beer going to his head.

"You aren't from Hawkins?" He asks, desperate to keep the

conversation rolling. His damp T-shirt clings to his skin and a chilly April breeze floats by, making them both shiver.

"No. I just moved. Sorta." She shakes her head and the creeping frown is replaced by another dazzling grin. "I'm Jane, by the way."

"Mike," he says, taking her offered hand to shake. As soon as their skin connects there's an electric thrill that shoots up his arm and then burning warmth that chases after it. He gasps quietly, inky-dark gaze flicking to her face searchingly; did she feel it too? Jane's own dark gaze locks with his, and for a long moment she seems as spellbound as he. Mike is almost a full foot taller than her, so when she murmurs, "fuck it," and throws herself up at him, he has to stoop and catch her.

Slender arms yank around his neck and she drags him down to meet halfway, and then firm lips crash against Mike's and his heart stops before lurching to life at a breakneck pace. The tingle of their hands is nothing compared to her mouth bruising his, fingers tugging on his black curls and body flush against his own. Mike drops his cup to hold her hips, resisting the urge to moan at the overwhelming sensation of this gorgeous girl kissing him and her small body held tightly against his. Aside from a few sloppy make out sessions at summer camp years ago, Mike Wheeler has never been kissed. And this girl definitely knows how to kiss - her tongue traces his lips, seeking entrance, and he can't resist letting her in.

"Let's go somewhere," she says, suddenly pulling back. Mike looks dazed as he nods. "My dad's at his girlfriends - he thinks I'm at my friend's. We could -"

"Yeah," Mike says, taking her delicate hand in his. "Let's go."

He would go to Endor if she asked him to, but fate would make it much easier on him. He is coherent enough to seek out Will in the crowd as they snail their way through the house, grinning like a dope at Will's comically round, shocked eyes. Dustin flashes him a thumbs up from the dance floor, sandwiched between two much taller girls and dancing wildly. It feels like a dream as they steal into the night, pausing every so often to kiss more and touch more and giggle, until they fall into the darkness of her home and then into her bed.

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The next morning dawns bright and Mike wakes up confused and thoroughly disoriented. Bright sunlight spills through the window, directly onto his face, and he winces with a groan. But he's warm and otherwise comfortable, so Mike turns his face into the pillow and is greeted with the overwhelming smell of vanilla and cinnamon and smoke. He inhales and smiles softly - then frowns.

Where the hell is he?

Every muscle stiffens as he tries to take stock. Pink walls, suspiciously blank. Filmy white curtains that do nothing to keep the sun out. Most worryingly, Mike realizes he's naked, and there is another seemingly naked body wrapped around him like a barnacle. Then he remembers - Jane, spilling a drink on him. Jane, throwing herself at him and kissing him like their lives depended on it. Jane taking him to her empty house. Getting in Jane's bed after tearing each other's clothes off between hungry, wet kisses. Jane as she slid on top of him, hands braces on his chest as she straddled him... Jane's face as she shivered and shook in ecstasy.

Mike had lost his virginity. And it had been a resounding success.

He fights the smirk on his lips and lifts a hand to stroke through the crazy tangle of waves that are almost smothering him. Not only has he lost his virginity -making Will the last of their group tondo so - but he'd lost it to the prettiest girl he'd ever seen. Yeah, they were total strangers, but she was moving to Hawkins and she had no idea how big of a nerd he was. Maybe he actually had a chance...

"What time is it?" Her scratchy morning voice is even adorable. She sits up, scrubbing a hand over her face, totally oblivious to her bated breasts which are perfect and so close that Mike almost can't breathe.

"Um..." he checks his digital watch and is immediately wracked with panic. "Eight-fifty. I have to go."

"Shit!" She leaps from the bed and Mike is frozen, watching her shimmy into her tiny pink panties and throw a T-shirt on. "I'm so dead. I have to go."

"Me too." Shaking himself mentally, Mike gets dressed quickly as to avoid any embarrassment- they might've had sex, but he's never been naked in broad daylight with a girl before - and jams his feet into his three-strip Adidas sneakers, socks lost somewhere in her room which, he notices in the stark light of day, is a mess. Boxes and clothes everywhere. Books in precarious stacks on every available surface. Cassette tapes strewn across the carpet in front of her boom box.

"So, um..." Mike wants to ask for her number, some scrap of reassurance she's going to want to see him again. He awkwardly takes a hand through the crown of messy black curls on his head.

"I'll see you Monday." On tiptoes, she plants a kiss on his cheek. That devilish smile is back. "Later, Mike."

Blushing, and smiling so Big his cheeks ache, Mike echoes her. "Later."

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"You're late," Jim says as his daughter trudges up the dewy grass in the late morning sunshine. She looks like crap - hair thrown in a messy banana clip, eye makeup hastily scrubbed off her face with traces under her sleepy brown eyes. At least she's wearing clean jeans and a soft pink sweater that warms her usually pale skin. He gives her a disappointed glare which she waves off like the smoke from his cigarette.

"Slept late. You know Max." It's the closest thing he's going to get to an apology, and Jim knows it, so he nods in acknowledgment and tosses his butt towards the designated pot on the corner of the porch. The Wheeler house is big, and as much as he dislikes the idea of moving in to the house she's bought with her ex, Jim knows that it's the smartest move. Karen has a life in Hawkins, one with friends and memories and an accumulation of things like books and furniture, and it's disrupting enough to have her kids thrown into the divorce and then their relationship. They shouldn't have to give up their home, too.

Plus, all she'd had to do was ask. Beautiful Karen, with her soft dark hair and bedroom eyes. He'd do anything she asked without

hesitation.

"Now, you be nice," Jim says, and Jane rolls her eyes but nods. "Best behavior, young lady."

"Bite me," she mutters, but pasted on a big smile as he pushes open the front door and nudges her in. Immediately, Karen's youngest child, Holly, bombards them. She's eight, with bouncing blonde pigtails that had made him lose his breath the first time he saw her. Made his chest ache, it reminded him so much...

Jane freezes too, reaction identical to his own. But she recovers quickly, shaking her head but barely, not enough for anyone but him to notice.

"Are you my new sister?" Holly asks bluntly. "Because my big sister is too busy having sex to play Barbies anymore, so if you're my new sister you have to play with me."

Jane's eyebrows nearly disappear beneath her bangs and she shoots Jim an amused look over her shoulder. Holly is nothing like Sarah, and it's a definite reminder when the former opens her mouth.

"I'll play Barbies with you," Jane promises, which makes Jim smile. She had never been much for dolls, but making an effort with Holly is a step in the right direction. After the past few years with her, the ups and downs after losing Sarah and then her mother leaving, the rebellious teenage years that everyone promised would end soon enough... Jim would buy Holly buckets of Barbies if it meant his daughter would settle down and humor her.

Jim is no fool. He knows that staying at Max Mayfield's means little to no supervision, since the redhead is usually left in the company of her older brother Billy. Jim was too much like Billy in his youth to pretend not to know what that means. He probably just left the girls home alone, or at least to their own devices, while he did whatever the hell he wanted. And that was a favorable idea compared to the rest. His daughter was too pretty to trust anyone around, especially twenty-one year old punks with mullets and fast cars.

"Come on. Karen put out a nice spread," he adds, and Jane follows

Holly into the dining room where Karen is just setting down a serving plate of Big, fluffy waffles. Jane's eyes go wide. They are her favorite.

"Good morning! You must be Jane," Karen says, brushing her hands over the adorable apron she wears over her dress. It's barely eleven AM but the woman looks like she stepped out of Better Homes and Garden, not a curl out of place. She extends her hand - her left, the engagement ring he'd purchased glinting on her fourth finger in the morning sunlight - and Jane shakes it politely. "I've heard so much about you!"

"You too, Mrs Wheeler," Jane says. She's pretending to be polite but Jim knows her too well. She's trying to get under Karen's skin. He'd done his best to earn the woman, and instead of any reaction she just smiles bigger and tilts her head.

"Please, call me Karen! Now, I see you've met Holly," Karen says, squeezing her daughter's shoulder. "My son should be down any minute... you kids could sleep all day long if we let you!" Her chuckle is positively musical, charming, and Jim can't wait to hear it for the rest of his life.

Jane sits down without comment, grabbing a plate and helping herself. Jim follows suit, pretending not to notice the looks of suspicion his daughter is shooting his fiancé. She's like him - always has been, since she was young - distrustful and observant, slow to accept change and grumpy. It's only gotten worse as she grew older. Sometimes, it worried him - a girl was supposed to have more than one friend, was supposed to have boys tying up the phone line, was supposed to spend hours holed up in the bathroom trying on make up or whatever. But not his Janie. She is more likely to be found hiding in her bedroom with her nose in a book, or at the arcade with Max. It was unfortunate when Max moved to Hawkins, leaving Jane friendless and desolate. Until he met Karen, and the world tilted on its axis and everything changed.

Now Jane and Max were reunited. Now Jim was in love, taking on a wonderful woman and her kids and household. It was a lot, but sometimes the pay off from the biggest risks were the best.

"Mom, I told Lucas -" Mike stumbles into the dining room, dark curls

a tangle and dripping onto the collar of his polo. His mouth snaps shut when his eyes land on Jane, who has gone absolutely still as well, a mouthful of waffles bulging her cheek out.

"Michael! This is Jim's daughter, Jane. Jane, this is my son, Mike." Karen beams at the two kids, oblivious to the way they're staring at each other. Jim is a cop, and rarely what anyone could call oblivious - willfully ignorant at times, but not dumb. There's something strange about the way Mike looks at his daughter, almost like he knows her. He glares suspiciously between the two, easily slipping into chief mode.

"Nice to meet you," Jane says softly after swallowing.

Her cheeks have gone as pink as her sweater. Mike looks speechless, paler than normal making his freckles stand out in stark contrast. Something is up, Jim thinks, but for the sake of Karen who looks so pleased to have them there, the smile Jane is giving her plate, and Holly chattering happily across the table, he keeps it to himself. For now.

2. Chapter 2

Hey all! Thanks for joining me on this curiosity voyage! A lot of you have voiced your distaste with the JimxKaren, and I get it. It's weird for me too. But rest assured, this WILL be a Mileven with a happily ever after. There might even be smutty outtakes if anyone is interested. So, if you're still with me, please please please let me know and leave me some love! Find me on tumblr - elevenseggoobsession - and let's be friends!

Chapter 2

After an awkward breakfast, Karen suggests Mike show her the house. "Since you'll be moving in so soon!" The woman is a Stepford, but Jane kinda feels bad for her. Single mom to three kids, dumb enough to fall for her emotionally complicated father... she flashes a smile and nods, pretending not to feel that quiver in her belly when Mike's dark gaze burns into her.

She was stoned last night. And a little tipsy. And Max had dragged her to the stupid party, then promptly abandoned her to make out with her boyfriend in some bedroom upstairs. Jane had been stranded and anxious, surrounded by total strangers in a strange house, and so she'd done what she usually did despite her promise that this place would be different. No fights, no bad boys, no partying... Hawkins was going to be different. No one knew her besides Max, and her best friend wasn't going to hold her past against her. She knew how badly Jane longed for change. A chance to be someone else. Someone better.

So far, she'd been good. It's spring break, and she spent the time organizing her new bedroom and catching up with Max. And then her dad informed her that he'd gotten out of the lease, they would be moving in with his fiancé and her kids, and her world tilted again. Fortunately, Jane had become very adaptable. Like tin metal - hammer her into shape and she would bend.

Maybe not with a smile or anything, but she'd bend.

And meeting Mike had seemed... serendipitous. He wasn't her usual

type - no cloud of smoke, no skin-tight acid wash jeans or leather jacket. He'd been standing by himself and she purposefully bumped into him - though spilling his drink had been accidental - hoping to entice a conversation. He was so tall, and his hair was like ink, black curls almost looking blue in the colorful strands of Christmas lights strung above their heads. He had seemed sad, and lonely, which was exactly how Jane was feeling, and she took a chance and it paid off.

Well, sort of. Last night had been perfect. Kissing and giggling and his mouth on her skin and her hands in his hair. A blur of pleasure, the sensations he eked out of her so different than ever before. It was like each caress erased fingerprints of anyone before. He made her feel soft and pretty and almost cherished. Mike had asked her permission with his eyes before making a new move, so respectful and delicate she wanted to scream out of impatience at times. As nice and promising as it had seemed, Jane is beginning to regret the wonderful time...

Because now she's awkwardly following him downstairs, into the basement, which is kind of cozy despite the mess. There is a card table covered in weird grid paper and tiny figurines. She recognizes a Millennium Falcon hanging from fishing wire from the ceiling in one corner, an older model TV with a VCR on a cart across from an ugly plaid couch that has obviously seen better days.

"So um, this is the basement," Mike says, gesturing around, pink splotches high on his cheeks. "Usually it's just my friends and me down here - Holly is afraid of the furnace."

"Mike," Jane says, shaking her head. She doesn't want to pretend he's just giving her a tour. They're out of the prying eyes of their parents and they don't have long to talk and figure this out.

"You can take my room, and I'll just move down here. I spend a lot of time down here anyway."

"Mike!" Jane wants to shake him. "Come on, this is weird enough."

"Yeah," he agrees with a hollow chuckle. "I finally meet a girl that doesn't suck and she's my sister."

Jane feels herself soften. She remembers last night - shy hands on her hot skin, the taste of his mouth and his soft lips blazing a trail down her throat... she shifts, heat pooling in her belly, and sighs.

"I know what you mean." She glances to the top of the stairs and bites her lip. If only things were different - she certainly wasn't in love with Mike Wheeler, but the way his freckles reminds her of constellations and how his dark eyes study her so intently makes Jane think it could have been possible. Under different circumstances, it seems more than possible.

But they were about to be siblings! There's no way Hopper would let her date a guy living under the same roof, and definitely not someone she was /supposed/ to think of as her brother. Jane chews her bottom lip thoughtfully, trying to work out any kind of plan, when she feels Mike's hands on her. One knots in her hair, the other cups her cheek so gently, like she's going to break under his longer fingers, and then they're kissing.

Jane quietly moans as his tongue invades her mouth, the sensation shooting straight to her core and making her hands fist in his shirt frantically. She can't get him close enough, craving his heated skin on her own so badly she could cry. If Karen or her father were to come down, they would be toast - for some reason this only makes her hotter, and she balances, wobbling on tip-toes to deepen the kiss.

"Unghh," Mike mumbles intelligently as she pulls back to catch her breath. His eyes flutter open and he blinks at her a few times, like he's just woken up, and smiles. "I wanted to do that since I saw you at the table."

"I know," Jane says, gulping air like she's been suffocated. "I wanted to, too."

"Jane, I -"

"Michael!" Holly's voice and the door creaking open make them both startle, jumping apart like they've been electrocuted. "Dustin's on the phone! He says to get your butt to Will's or they're starting without you!"

"Shit," Mike says, looking incredibly annoyed. "I have a thing, with my friends. I have to go."

"Oh, yeah. Definitely. We can talk later," Jane says, though she really wants to continue the kissing. It's so much nicer, easier, than the conversation they inevitably need to have. Before he jogs up the stairs, Mike pulls her in for another searing, but over far too quick, kiss. She's breathless as he gives her a crooked grin. "Later, Jane."

"Ok guys," Joyce is saying as Mike breezes into the Byers' home. She's in her Melvald's vest, hair clipped back with dark bangs framing her wide, tired eyes. "I'll be home by eight. I want these dishes done, and please - for the love of God - don't blow anything up."

"That was one time," Dustin mutters under his breath, looking guilty. Joyce kisses Will on top of his head before shooting Mike a smile and slipping out the front door. Mrs Byers is always in a rush, and lately it seemed to be worse than normal. But she smiles more, and he noticed last week that she had lipstick on. Whoever he is, Mike hopes the guy is good to her and his friend. Will and his brother, Jonathan, have a drunk and destitute father that does nothing for them. The new guy doesn't have much to measure up to.

"Hey Romeo," Will greets, nudging him with an elbow as Mike flops beside him on the couch. "What happened last night?"

"Yeah!" Dustin exclaims, eyes going wide as saucers. He gives him a purr, which makes Lucas roll his eyes. "Who was that girl? Did you score?"

Mike goes red as a tomato at their teasing. He's never had a real romantic partner before, and he's never left a party with a girl. He's always just been too shy and awkward, too afraid to step out of his comfort zone. Jane had to be brave enough for both of them.

Just the thought of her makes his heart pound. He can't stop thinking of her - the AV club meeting is supposed to distract him, but so far it's not. Instead, he finds himself wondering how he's going to deal with having her around him constantly, how he's going to hide his feelings

for her from his family... What is he supposed to tell the guys? That he hooked up with his soon to be sister?

He's a shit liar, and they know it. No way he can pretend. Mike wants to scream and hit something as the realization dawns on him. Mike can't like Jane. They can never be anything - at least, nothing more than friends. Siblings. He certainly doesn't feel the heat in his belly for Nancy or Holly. In fact, that's the proverbial dousing of ice water he needs to think clearly.

"Earth to Mike," Dustin chuckles, waving a hand in front of his face. "She must be pretty awesome if she's got you this messed up."

"Nothing happened," Mike says, blowing out a long breath. "I walked her home, and then this morning, I found out that her dad is the guy my mom is marrying." It sounds weird out loud, but the guys buy it. Now he can't even tell them he's no longer a virgin - not that he was planning to brag about it... much. He realizes the room is silent and all eyes are on him. His cheeks heat up even more, to the roots of his hair, and he scrubs a hand over his face out of frustration. This got way too complicated, way too quickly.

"Dude. That blows," Dustin says. Even with his teeth, the lisp comes out now and then, making them all crack a smile. "She was hot."

"How awkward was that?" Lucas asked, fighting laughter. "The police chief and his hot daughter you /almost/ hooked up with?" He cackles and even Will looks amused.

"It was awkward," Mike agrees. "And now they're moving in with us."

"Well, at least you guys didn't do it. Because that would make things even worse." Will pats his shoulder sympathetically and the others nod in agreement.

You have no idea, Mike thinks.

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"Janie," Billy Hargrove drawls when he answers the door. Jane glares at him, crossing her arms over her chest. He makes her skin crawl, and she loathes that Max has such a creep for a brother. He leans one

arms against the door, hooking his other thumb in the belt loop of his tight jeans, grinning at her. More like leering, Jane thinks.

"Max home?" She asks, keeping her tone anything but friendly. Being nice to Billy only encourages him, and Jane has been down that road before.

"Where else would she be?" Billy asks, rolling his eyes. "Little Bitch! Your friend is here!"

Jane pulls a disgusted face and pushes past him, ignoring the mock-hurt expression he makes. She can hear the blaring music coming from behind Max's bedroom door. She doesn't bother knocking, instead opening the door and slamming it behind her. She sighs in relief as soon as she's away from Billy, finding it easier to breathe when she's out of his view.

"Knock much?" Max asks, adjusting her stereo volume so the two can converse without shouting.

"I need to talk to you," Jane says, flopping beside her best friend on the side queen-size bed. Max continues carefully applying neon green grip tape to her board, sea-green eyes narrow and focused. "I met someone last night."

"I know," Max huffs. "I looked for you for like, an hour before Lucas dragged me home. I almost missed curfew."

Shit. She's mad. Jane glances over to Max and bites her lip. "I'm sorry. You abandoned me to go hook up with your boyfriend; I was mad. But I'm sorry I didn't tell you..."

"It's fine. Tell me about the guy." Max gives her a little smile, quickly forgiving her, and Jane groans.

"He's nothing like my usual type," she says, thinking of tall, lanky, freckled Mike. "He's a nerd, I think."

"I told ya," Max says with a cheeky smile. "My nerdy boy is perfect."

"Ok, but you called him stalker for the first six months you knew him," Jane points out. "He wasn't perfect at first."

"Anyway. Your nerd." Max, satisfied with her tape job, settles her skateboard on the ground beside her bed then wiggles down beside Jane so that they're side by side chocolate curls clash with copper-penny waves, and they shift so their heads are just barely touching. Back in middle school, when they both lived in Jackson and went to school together, their teacher had told them about osmosis and somehow, the best friend decided that if their heads were touching, it would be easier to share thoughts. It was an old habit that had yet to die.

"We hooked up," Jane says slowly.

"You slut!" Max exclaims before cackling. "On the first night?! Did you even know his name?"

"Yes," Jane says defensively. "It's Mike."

A long moment of silence. Jane can practically hear the cogs turning in Max's head until she gets it. "Mike Wheeler?"

"That's the one," she says.

"He and Lucas are best friends." Max sounds thoughtful - not panicked as Jane expects. "He's really smart. Sometimes funny. And nice. I guess he's sorta... cute," she sounds like Jane is forcing the admission from her with threat of bodily harm.

"He's also about to be my stepbrother." Jane sighs, ticks the seconds in her head, and finally Max explodes.

"What! You fucked your brother?!"

They both sit up, looking scandalized. Jane can see every filling in Max's mouth, her jaw hangs so far open.

"He's not my brother -"

"Yet!"

"Step! Step brother!" Jane wrings her hands distressed, near tears. "Max, how can this happen? I mean, I barely know him but I actually /like/ him, you know?"

"Whoa," Max says, holding her hand up. "Like, more than a random hookup like him?"

"He's not like other guys," Jane replies slowly. "He's sweet... he makes me feel like I could be /better/ than I am..." A flash of memory, hands on her skin and her throat and the dirty feeling that she can never wash clean slides over her. Jane shakes the repulsion away, ignoring the sad looking Max gives her. "It felt like a fresh start."

"Oh, Jane," Max says, pulling her into a rare hug. "It'll be ok. We will figure this out." Calloused hands stroke her hair and Jane sighs into the comfort of her best friend's embrace, hoping hard that she's right.

3. Chapter 3

Here ya go! Another update. I'm a few chapters ahead but really enjoying this ride. I hope you do too! Let me know!

Chapter 3

Jane is glad that she doesn't see Mike again that day. Jim is at home, doing laundry and packing boxes, when she gets back from Max's. For some reason, she's exhausted, and yawns widely as she shuts the front door behind her. Her dad glances up from wrapping their few Knick-knacks in newspapers and stuffing them in boxes.

"Don't you ever get tired of each other?" He asks with an impish grin. Jane smiles, shrugging.

"I missed her when she moved! A lot has changed and we have to catch up." Jane doesn't need to add that she'd barely seen her best friend last night, as Chief Hopper would surely not be amused to find they'd snuck out to a party and split up. One of the perils of having a policeman as a father.

"Yeah, well. She can come over here, ya know." Jane dramatically widens her eyes and looks around their tiny rented home. They don't even have a television, and most belongings haven't been unpacked - those that have will quickly be put away, since they're moving again so quickly. Jim chuckles at her pantomime and nods. "Ok, ok. I get it. But you need to work on that room of yours - like a damn bomb went off in there."

Jane feels her spine stiffen and tries not react; she has no idea the state she left it in this morning after booting Mike out. Vaguely, she remembers him holding up a copy of Anne of Avonlea that had been under the blankets on her bed, grinning at her before she yanked it from his hand and chucked it over her shoulder... "I'll work on it tonight. When do we 'officially' move?"

"Landlord is giving us til the weekend. Kinda nice, considering everything." Sheepishly he scratches his neck and glances down. It feels so fast to Jane, in part because she was still adjusting to the idea

that her father is dating - engaged, she corrects herself - and moving to Hawkins. Now, less than two weeks, and they're moving /again/. At least it's the same school district, and she has Max and maybe Mike, to lean on.

"Well," Jane says, "at least we'll be done for at least a month after this." She's trying to joke but it falls flat. Hopper glances at her from under his thick brows, and she hates the way he can see her, can read her, so well. Sighing, she trudges into the living room and flops on the sofa, which was staying with the house. All of the furniture had been there when they moved in.

"You ok, kid?" Her dad asks. "I know this is all pretty sudden -"

"Understatement," She quips.

"But I love Karen. And I think you will too. After your mom..." And Sarah, Jane thinks, hating the lump that forms in her throat and the tears that burn the edges of her vision. "I never thought I could feel like this again. I didn't know I even wanted to..."

Jane remembers those dark days. It seemed like Hopper was never around, and when he was, it was worse than when he was gone. They had already lost her younger sister to cancer that ravaged her young body like a turbulent sea thrashes a little boat, and then her mother had simply packed up one day and left without them. No note. No call. It was like they were nothing, like Jane was less than nothing. Of course they both struggled in their own ways...

Jane can admit that her father seems better now, happier. No more empty beer cans to toss out every morning, no mysterious empty pill bottles in the medicine cabinet. He shaved and bathed regularly, he slept at night. And they talked again, shared TV dinners together and sometimes even laughed. And if Karen had managed all of that, to make her father a person again, shouldn't she be happy for him?

But a small, selfish piece of her resents all of it. Uprooting her in the end of her junior year, moving away from the life she'd known... but like Max said, it's a fresh start. She can be a new person. No one has to find out about what's happened to her before, or what she's done.

Surely, if Mike knew the kind of girl she was...

"It's ok, dad. Really." Jane drops her hands and sighs. She doesn't want to talk anymore, or think about this. Her head aches and her skin is getting that strange, tingly numb sensation that makes her feel like she's suffocating. "Karen seems... nice. Definitely a better cook than me." Hopper smiles at that.

"You haven't had her meatloaf yet. It'll knock your socks off." His grin turns playful and Jane can't resist returning it, loving the twinkle in his blue gaze. If Karen can bring that out in him, she can't be all bad.

"I'm going to work on my room," Jane says, standing and stretching. "Plus, first day tomorrow and all..."

"You'll do great," her dad says, full of confidence in her. "Just, ya know, smile and don't bite anyone's heads off."

"No promises," Jane says. She heads down the hallway to her little pink bedroom, sagging against the door once she shuts it. Flipping on the light, her eyes nearly bulge out of her head at the disarray they left behind. Books knocked over, clothes strewn all about. One of her cassettes looks like it's been stomped in half. Groaning, she reluctantly drops to her knees and starts to pick up the mess she's made.

Mike tries on four different shirts before settling on a plain gray polo with a blue zip-up hoodie over it. Paired with khakis, the only ones that aren't too short on him, and his trusty Adidas, he feels casual but nice. Like he's not trying too hard, though he certainly is. One last glance in the mirror, after spitting out his toothpaste and rinsing it down the drain, and he sighs.

Why couldn't he just be effortless like Steve Harrington? The guy was perfect, from his strategically messy hair to his well-fitting jeans and careless smile. Even Lucas seemed so confident and cool now, with his Varsity letterman jacket and high top fade. It feels like Dustin, Will, and Mike are doomed forever to be dorky as hell, with no fashion sense or cool cunning.

That's why you were a virgin less than forty-eight hours ago, Mike tells himself, frowning at his freckled face in the mirror. He flips off the bathroom light and heads downstairs, missing the bottom step and landing on his butt when he sees Jane standing there.

"Wha-" Mike blinks, dumbfounded, as she cracks a wry grin and offers a hand to pull him up. She's wearing a short, pleated Navy skirt and a high collared white blouse, hair loose in waves that fall over her shoulders. Jane is so gorgeous it hurts to look at her. Even her knees are pretty, half-covered by knee socks.

"You're giving me a ride," she says, and again his mind goes straight to somewhere it shouldn't; flashes of their night together, the flare of her hips under his long fingers...

"Well that's pretty presumptuous," Mike says after a beat too long and both of their faces are pink.

"Well, I rode you last time, so you owe me." Jane winks and turns on her heel, leaving him to gape after her in surprise. Mike is quickly discovering that where Jane is concerned, he's never going to figure her out. She might look sweet and innocent in that tiny blue skirt but her ruby, pouted lips say otherwise. Mike likes it, likes that she can sassy and smirk and somehow leaving him aching for her after making a fool of himself only moments earlier.

Mike's never met anyone like Jane Hopper.

He finds her standing outside of the open garage, eyeing the cars there - a used burgundy Oldsmobile and a newer BMW. "You drive the granny car, I'm guessing?" One delicate eyebrow arches, the quirk of her lips teasing, and Mike nods. "Cute. Let's motor - I'm sure I have eight pages of paperwork to fill out when I get there."

The ride is quick and Mike isn't used to being so wide awake as he makes the drive. He notices Dustin, in the Shaggin' Wagon, driving Will and Lucas, and the flash of copper in the back makes him realize Max is with them. Momentarily, he's glad to be alone with Jane, and despite how his gut clenches with nervous anxiety, he knows they need to talk before the day begins.

He's been worried about this since yesterday afternoon, and has had the conversation in his mind a thousand times, which somehow only serves to make his palms sweat against the steering wheel. He wants to sound cool, but caring; confident yet respectful. Instead, he blurts out loudly, "I didn't say that we slept together!" Which, out of nowhere, makes Jane flinch and snap her neck turning her head to look at him.

"Excuse me?" She asks, blinking at his outburst.

"I mean, my friends - I told them that I walked you home from the party. That uh, that nothing happened and then I found out our parents are getting married." Mike grips the wheel until his knuckles are white. The line of traffic is slow turning into the parking lot, which is a blessing and a curse. It gives them time to talk, but it also gives them /time to talk/ and Mike is trapped in a Schrodinger's conundrum of wanting to be there and also wanting to be anywhere else.

"Oh." Jane's lips form a small 'o' of surprise before she nods. "That's... actually really nice of you, Mike. Most guys would be bragging." He doesn't notice the way her fingers tremble as she drags them through her wild curls.

"Well, What was I supposed to say? Hey, I accidentally lost my virginity to my new step sister? That would've been..."

"Weird," they say simultaneously, then laugh. Mike finds a spot and parks the car. He's about to get out when Jane grabs his arm.

"It sucks, Mike. I really like you. But I think..." his heart pounds as she pauses, like she's searching for the correct words. "I think we should try to put it behind us. For the family." Jane bites her lip, big brown eyes on his, seeming nervous and worried, too. As much as he wants to scoop her into his arms and kiss her as hard as he can, to feel her heaving chest against his own with no barriers between them... Mike knows she's right. It's what they /should/ do, of course. Put the past behind them. Try to be... siblings, he guesses.

His mother definitely seems happier having a man around the house, and Hopper seems like a nice guy. He doesn't drink his feelings like

Mike's father did. He paid attention when Mike spoke, even asked him questions beyond what he was studying in school...

Yes, Jane was right. They would forget it - no matter how impossible that idea seemed, and work towards getting to know each other, as friends.

"Yeah," Mike says, nodding firmly. "You're definitely right. For the family." Her smile is megawatt, enough to blind him, and Mike has to look away. Together, they climb out of his "granny car" and trudge across the student parking lot together. Mike pushes the thoughts of lust and disappointment as far down as they will go.

"Wait," Jane says, stopping in her tracks and grabbing his arm again. "Did you really lose your virginity to me?" And for some reason, it's all so ridiculous, and he can't help the belly laugh that comes out of him. He drops his bag, doubling over with laughter, and Jane is smiling at him like he's lost his mind until she's giggling too.

—

"Every time I look at Wheeler, I just can't believe you fucked him," Max whispers, making Jane blush and glance around to make sure no one has overheard. They're standing at the small hymn lockers, having changed for physical education and delaying the inevitable. Whatever moron made PE first period was a sadist, Jane thought as she surveyed her schedule in the school office. Everyone seems to know who she is, saying they've heard all about the new chief and his daughter. It's intimidating, and Jane feels all out of sorts. She's glad that at least she can hang out with Max most of the day, and especially in first period gym. She would never make it without her.

"Shut up, Mayfield," Jane says with a scowl.

"It's just... he's so not your type! Like, I doubt he's ever smoked a cigarette in his life -"

"You know I quit," Jane mutters under her breath.

"He probably listens to like, Debbie Gibson in his closet -"

"He songs can be catchy," Jane argues softly.

"I bet he has Star Wars sheets," Max says between laughter. "I bet her jerks off to Princess Leia."

"You're really mean, you know that?" Jane folds her arms over her chest and glares. Max does not appear the least bit apologetic but does try to smother her grin.

"Anyway. We are trying to be friends," Jane replies. "No more sexy times." She is actually incredibly disappointed about this, but she sees no other alternative.

"There's plenty of fish in the sea," Max says. The gym teacher blows her whistle, startling them all, and grudgingly the best friends follow the others out into the big, empty gymnasium. Jane is terribly uncoordinated and thanks her lucky stars that Max /is/, using the redhead as a shield from the volleyballs that always manage to find her.

The rest of the day goes by in a blur of new faces and too many names to remember. Her teachers are fine - the exception is Mr Clarke, the science teacher, and his dorky enthusiasm is contagious. She has that class with Mike, and she joins his group of friends in the front of the room, despite the fact that doing so goes against everything in her nature. Jane has always been more prone to hiding from her teachers in the back of the room, where no one would notice if she fell asleep...

But she keeps reminding herself that this time, she's doing things differently. A fresh start. Clean slate. A chance to turn her life around... and even though she's sworn off romantic feelings for Mike, Jane wants to feel like someone that he could love. His friends obviously adore him; they follow him around school, meet at his locker between classes, and when he runs late at lunch, the smallest one, Will Byers, has saved him a seat and grabs him extras so he doesn't have to wait in the line. Jane feels every inch the outsider, though they're polite and try to include her. She feels somewhat jealous even, watching them all - even Max - interact. The laughter, inside jokes, memories she has no way of infiltrating... Jane has only Max, and though they are still best friends, it's not intense like this. It hasn't been since Max moved.

By the end of the day, Jane is feeling frustrated, a little sad, and very overwhelmed. It's all so different, and as she waits for Mike at his car, opting for a few minutes away from the Gang, she wishes for a cigarette.

Until a tall, handsome kid in too-tight jeans and a leather motorcycle jacket approaches her. Jane tries to ignore him, until he's right in her face, lifting his aviators into his hair, grinning and smacking his gum at her like he thought he was Tom Cruise.

"Hey there," he says, bracing one arm on the roof of the granny mobile. His dark gaze slides down her body - in another world, another life, Jane would have found this thrilling. Instead, she wants to hide. "Must be the new bird everyone is talking about. I'm Troy." His cocky attitude makes Jane think that she's supposed to swoon or something. Instead, she clamps her mouth shut tight and stares at her shoes.

"What? Cat got your tongue?" He slides a finger beneath her chin, tipping her face up and forcing their eyes to meet. Jane resists, focusing on a point over his shoulder instead. It's another pretty spring day, not a cloud in the sky, and the parking lot bustles with activity. Jane is comforted by the fact that there are too many people around for him to /really/ do something. It gives her a boost of confidence.

"No," she replies. "I just don't waste my time on mouth breathers like you." Jane glares at him, and Troy chuckles. Like it's adorable.

"Let me know when you get bored with the Nerd Herd," he says, getting impossibly closer so his hot breath washes over her face. Jane recoils, mouth turned down like she smells something rotten.

"Get a life," she spits out, then pushes him away. "Leave me alone." Troy backs up, chuckling, letting his eyes rove over her coltish legs, making her shiver in disgust. Damn Mike for locking this stupid car! Jane wills the sting of tears to leave her eyes. She feels embarrassed and dirty. It's a good thing she curved Mike before he could truly grow feelings for her. He was so pure, and Jane only seems to attract one thing, whether she wants to or not. She bites hard at her cheek and stares at the ground, even as the image starts to swim with

unshed tears.

It doesn't matter where she goes, Jane thinks bitterly. She can only pretend for so long.

4. Chapter 4

Smutty outtake from Ch 1 coming soon. Some people have requested to see Mike losing his virginity, so I'm working on that! Thank you for reading and leaving me feedback. You're all fantastic!

Chapter 4

If Mike notices her distance, quietly staring out the window with a pensive frown, he doesn't say anything. Once they reach his house - soon to be their house, the thought making Jane fill up with dread - they head inside. It's quiet, and for a moment Jane stands in the kitchen cradling her books to her chest. She's slowly recovering from the moment in the parking lot, feeling silly for letting herself get so upset. It wasn't like he tried anything. Guys like Troy only made their move under a cover of darkness, or when she was too fucked up to say yes or no. No matter how hard she tries, it transports her back to two winters ago, the first party she'd ever gone to on her own.

What a mistake that had been.

"Hungry?" Mike asks, drawing her out of the spiral of dark thoughts. He's already pulling a yellow box out of the freezer, dropping a couple Eggos into the toaster slots. "Mom made a casserole for dinner. I gotta throw it in the oven once it's warmed up."

It's strangely adorable, watching him move easily around his kitchen. Turning the knob on the stove, pulling the covered dish out of the refrigerator. Jane and Hopper were well known in their old town at diners and fast-food establishments. Their grocery list was limited to frozen entrees, Folgers, lunch meat... she watches curiously as Mike puts the casserole in the oven and sets a timer carefully. He flashes her a sheepish smile when he notices her watching.

"My sister, Nancy - she's away at college with her boyfriend - Well, she used to do all this stuff." His Big hands gesture around the cheery room, and Jane nods.

"It's probably easier for your mom." She's not sure what else to say. Being alone with Mike is making her feeling hyper aware, self conscious, and she touches her hair absently.

"Yeah, you know, after my dad left she was kind of a mess. Like - she didn't even wear make up for a week. I thought we would have to commit her." Jane knows he's serious, and the flash of sadness in her eyes stops her laughter short. It seems so... innocent compared to what happened with Hopper. Jane remembers many mornings spent holding a mirror in front of his face, to make sure he was still breathing in his alcohol induced sleep. "So Nancy and I tried really hard to make sure we helped. I learned how to do laundry even."

He's proud, Jane can tell, and feels a smile tugging at her mouth. "Did you turn anything pink?"

"Just my socks and underwear," he admits, and they both chuckle. The toaster pops the waffles up, and Mike hands one to her plain. "Wanna go downstairs and do our homework?" She nods and watches him hold the Eggo between his teeth, grabbing his books and then leading the way.

Jane is struck again by the strangely comforting area, then realizes it's probably because the space is filled with Mike. She pushes away the sense of affection that makes her heart swell as she watches him toss his books on the couch, flick on the lamp, and chew on his waffle. It's like a peek into his mind, and she finds herself wanting to dig deeper. She wants to /know/ him, and not just in the Biblical sense. It's been a long time since she wanted to let someone - let alone a guy - into her life, but it's too easy with Mike. He's soft, comforting, full of simple smiles and quick laughter. If she's not careful, Jane can see herself getting hurt. Again.

That's all people do, isn't it? Whether they mean to or not, Jane finds that it's all that comes from being around other humans...

"So, what did you think? How was your first day?" Mike seems genuinely interested, and Jane sits beside him on the couch, careful to keep as much space as possible between them. Why invite any unnecessary touches? It'll only lead to bad, though very alluring, things.

"It was ok. It's nice to be with Max again. I missed her a lot." Jane pulls at a loose thread on her skirt. She's reminded of the flare of jealousy she'd felt at lunch, watching her best friend laugh and joke with the guys. It makes her feel hot and angry, even though she / knows/ how ridiculous her emotions are. "I liked our science class."

Mike brightens. "Mr Clarke is the best. I help out with his freshmen classes - next year I'm going to be his aide." How adorably geeky, Jane thinks, biting back a grin.

"I mean, other than PE, it was... good." Jane is shocked that she's not lying. It was good, despite the roller coaster of emotions that flicker through her all day long. It wasn't all bad, at least, which is more than she could hope for.

"There's a lot of clubs and extracurricular activities," Mike says, "I'm sure you'll find something to get into. I bet you could even make the spirit squad, if you wanted."

Jane quirks an eyebrow. "Do I strike you as someone that wants to be on the spirit squad?"

His cheeks burn red and she finds even this adorable. He's very easy to tease, and his reactions broadcast so vividly across his face. "I just - I mean, you're so pretty, you know? You could definitely be part of the popular crowd."

Now /she/ blushes.

An awkward, tense silence stretches between them, and when Jane finally glances up at Mike, he's staring at her. Practically burning her skin with the intensity in his deep, dark eyes.

"You think I'm pretty?" Jane's voice is small, unsure.

"Really pretty," Mike breathes out softly. Before her brain can catch up with her body, she lunges across the distance between them and attacks his mouth. He makes a yelp of surprise as their lips connect, fire in her veins and her hands weaving into his dark curls as they've been itching to do all day. He's so... pretty? Jane finds herself insanely attracted to him, though she knows it can never be... but she

wants him, and if the way he holds her tightly, his tongue tracing her lips in askance, is any indication, he wants her just as badly.

For a long while, Jane loses herself in the mindless pleasure of kissing Mike. Their lips fit together like matching puzzle pieces; he tastes sweet, warm. For a virgin, he somehow knows precisely how to make her gasp and quietly moan, swinging a leg over his lap to straddle him.

Mike breaks off suddenly, tossing his head back as his hands bunching in the fabric of her skirt, pushing her down against him as his hips rocked up. They're both gasping at the sensation the contact ignites.

Until the door slams upstairs, and Karen calls out, "Mike! We're home!" And the sound of footsteps rips them from their lusty haze. Both fumbling, Jane and Mike separate to their opposite ends of the ratty couch. Her lips feel swollen, and Mike pulls a textbook into his lap, staring at the words intently.

"Mike?" Karen appears at the top of the basement stairs.

"D-down here!" He stammers. Jane shoots him an amused look, and he scowls at her darkly. "I thought we weren't /doing/ that anymore."

"Sorry. It - it was an accident. It won't happen again." Jane looks appropriately chastised.

"I can't be your friend - your /brother/ - if you keep doing that," Mike hisses as his mother clacks down the stairs in her heels. Jane schools her features into a neutral, innocent expression as Karen smiles at them.

"Jane! I didn't realize you were here." She smooths a hand over her perfect Farrah Fawcett curls, in a soft brown instead of blonde like the actress, and cocks her head to the side. "How was your first day?"

"Fine," she said with a nod. "It was nice to have some people I knew to show me the ropes."

"I'm so glad! I think your dad planned on staying for dinner. Do you have a lot of homework? Because I was thinking about how we could

reorganize Nancy's room, make it more your own..."

Jane is relieved for an excuse to put some space between herself and Mike. A chance to let their blood cool off and their hormones to simmer. She nearly jumps off the couch to follow Karen upstairs, her lips still tingling from being pressed so hard against Mike's.

That night, after a dinner with Jane and Hopper, Mike digs his super comm out of the laundry hamper, turning it on to test the batteries. Now that they're older, the gang hasn't used the walker-talkies anymore. The phone is just as quick, but for some reason it seems less personal, so Mike results to their old way of chatting.

He also knows that Dustin is probably the only one that will respond - Lucas is always busy either studying, at some sport practice, or making out with Max. Will is too far out of range. Holding down the button, Mike says, "Dustin, you copy? Over." He fiddles with the antenna, hands restless and nerves making him fidget. He doesn't know what to do - this whole Jane situation is throwing him for a loop.

"Mike? What are you doing? Over." Dustin responds quicker than Mike anticipated and he's grateful. Next to Max, Dustin was the newest addition to the party, coming in fourth grade when his parents split and his mother got a job at the elementary school. Claudia Henderson was a bit overbearing, but overall sweet and doting. Mike always thought that had Dustin had more siblings, his mom would have been less obsessed with his every move, and probably owned less cats.

"I um... just needed some advice. Over." While not entirely the truth, it's as close as he's comfortable getting to it. Dustin would probably not tease him about Jane, but he was notoriously awful at keeping secrets. His mind was Swiss cheese, letting every thought he had escape through his mouth.

"If this is about the chem final, I can only say one thing: force be with us all. Over." Mike grins and rolls his eyes. Of course Dustin would think it was something as innocuous as schoolwork.

How did he put into words what he was feeling? How he struggles to keep his thoughts pure, how to keep his mind from remembering how sexy she looked and how good she felt, skin slicked with sweat and so hot against him? The brief make out session in his basement had only thrown fuel on the embers of his feelings. Mike doesn't know how he's supposed to simply /forget/ all of this when she's constantly in his space.

And moving in. And then she'll be everywhere, when he first wakes up in the morning and before he falls asleep. Right down the hall... so close yet terribly out of reach.

His mother had gushed over dinner how fabulous they would make Nancy's room. How they would purchase new bedding and clear the shelves to make room for Jane's belongings. Jane was quiet through the entire meal, nodding and agreeing when necessary, but Mike couldn't help but notice the way she pushed her food around her plate. Not really eating, just moving the food around so it looked like she had. Holly had regaled them with a tale from third grade, which made everyone smile and chuckle - though Jane was more muted. Mike worried that he did something to upset her.

Before she and Hopper left - he was trying not to gag as the older couple made out in the kitchen - Mike found Jane waiting at the front door, looking equally uncomfortable.

"So... think you'll need a ride tomorrow?" He notices the instant blush that stains her cheeks and tries not to laugh. "To school. In my car."

"Um, probably." She bites her lip, and they stand in awkward silence until she delicately clears her throat. "I'm sorry, about earlier... I didn't mean to just throw myself at you."

Now Mike feels his ears grow hot. "Um, it's ok. I don't mind, it's just confusing."

"Right? So confusing." She shakes her head, pretty eyes rolling. "Anyway. No more, right?" And he had agreed. Then said goodnight. And now he had Dustin squeaking at him over the super comm.

"Mike, do you copy? Over!"

"Sorry," Mike says, shaking himself. "I'm just confused about... a girl."

"Oh buddy," Dustin says with a hearty laugh. "You got it bad for Jane Hopper. I could totally tell at lunch, you were all heart eyes-"

Son of a bitch, Mike thinks. This was a mistake. He can just picture Dustin telling Will and Lucas, and by extension, Max, all about this tomorrow on their drive to school.

"She's cute, I get it. But dude, she's gonna be your /sister/ and no matter what, you gotta keep that in mind. Over." Dustin surprises him with his logic, it's sound. But it's not what Mike wants to hear.

"But how do you just stop... liking someone? Over." Mike has no experience - all the girls they go to school with, he's known since kindergarten, and they all witnessed him eating paste or ate it with him. It was hard to think of any of them as more than prissy classmates. Plus, he was president of the AV club, not the captain of the football team. No one was beating down his door.

"You remember when Max moved here, right? Lucas and I both liked her." Mike furrows his brow - it was years ago, but he does vaguely remember some heated glares and unusual arguments over the D&D games that never really seemed like they were about the next action. "Well, when Max kissed Lucas at the Snow Ball, it was pretty clear she'd made her choice. And I had to accept that. No matter how bad it sucked. Over."

Mike chews his cheek thoughtfully. Dustin sounds sort of wise which isn't usually his forte, but he's right. Mike just has to accept what Jane says, even if it doesn't always line up with her actions.

"Thanks. I'll work on that. Over and out, Dustin." He doesn't wait for a response and switches the comm off, smacking the antenna down, and tossing it back towards his laundry hamper. He still has homework to do, and wipes a hand over his tired face as he drags himself towards the basement. Mike thinks their Lit homework - *Catcher in the Rye* - might be the perfect thing to take his mind off this Jane mess.

"I can't stop kissing him," Jane says as soon as Max picks up the phone. Her voice is strained and Max knows her friend well enough to tell that she's about to have a full blown attack - anxiety or panic, or both. "It's like, he's just sitting there and he's so sweet and nice and kind and then boom I'm in his lap, grinding on him and kissing him - god, I'm such a whore -"

Billy is lingering in the doorway, so Max flips him the bird and drags the phone and cradle into her bedroom, slamming the door. Her stepbrother is slime and she knows full well how he feels about / Jane/, which makes her stomach tumble and churn with dread. Max loathes him, and his stupid father. Her mother /obviously/ had atrocious taste in men, but it wasn't like Max got a say in the matter.

"Slow down," Max instructs, keeping her tone firm. Lucas glances up from where he's sprawled on her bed, and she shakes her head, telling him silently not to worry. "Breathe in and out... slow." She hears Jane take a few gulping breaths and slowly, she starts to calm down. Max has no idea how many times she's had to talk Jane down off the ledge, but it's too many. Once is too many.

"No matter what I do, Max. I can't help it." Jane sounds positively miserable. Her voice shakes with guilt and despair. "And Mike - he's so, so nice. And so cute. And he's not like every other guy - he doesn't look at me like - like -"

"It's ok," Max says. "I get it. He /is/ a good guy. You aren't used to that." Lucas rolls into his stomach, dark skin almost glowing in the soft lighting of her bedside lamp. His eyebrows are nearly disappearing into his hair line.

"Why does he have to be my almost stepbrother? You know, my bedroom is literally right across the hallway. Like, three steps and I'm in his room."

"It is unfortunate," Max agrees sympathetically.

"But what do I /do/? How am I supposed to cope with wanting him?"

Oh Jane, Max thinks sadly. Her best friend sounds broken and so, so sad. She knows vaguely what happened after Max left - a string of

failed relationships, guys that pressured her into doing things she didn't want, a lot of partying and breaking curfew and sneaking out... it wasn't the Jane that Max had known since before they could walk. She'd been lost, foundering without a comrade or confidant. No matter how hard they both tried, the distance was too great and they were propelled into different directions.

When Jane found out she was moving to Hawkins, it felt like fate. They would be reunited, they would make amends, be closer than ever... but it felt like Jane's past was a constant dark cloud hanging over her best friend, and no matter how far or fast she ran she couldn't escape the storm that brewed there.

Max had a terrible feeling that some day, she would simply explode from trying to keep it all together.

"I don't know," Max replies honestly. She hears the tears in her voice - she wants to take all the pain away. Between what happened to Sarah, her mother leaving, and everything else... Max feels Lucas's soothing hands card through her hair, and she tips her head back to gaze at him.

Lucas is her rock. The concern in his coffee-brown eyes makes her feel warm in her chest. She grabs his hand, pressing a kiss to the pink of his palm. She wishes Jane knew what it's like to have someone to make her feel like everything can be better - that there's something to look forward to. Lucas's love feels like a promise, like a warm blanket out of the dryer. He drives her crazy, but in the best way, and she never knew trust until she loved him.

Max hears Jim in the background telling Jane to get off the phone and get to bed. "I gotta go."

"Everything will be ok, Jane. I know it." And gazing into her boyfriend's open, handsome face, Max just knows it will be.

5. Chapter 5

Chapter 5

Friday night comes and Jane draws herself the last bath of their old house, thinking she won't be likely to do this much when she and Hopper are living at the Wheelers'. There's too many people and too little bathrooms for her to feel comfortable soaking for a long time. Plus, being that naked while under the same roof as Mike has a strange effect on her stomach, similar to the tilt-a-whirl ride at the fair. But more pleasant.

The water is steamy and the bubbles fizz around her as she sinks in. Jane has her hair in a messy ponytail on top of her head, secured with a scrunchy, and little tendrils cling to her damp neck. Closing her eyes and tilting her head on the rim of the tub, she wills her mind to shut down for thirty seconds. Slow breath in, slow breath out. Just like Max always says.

Her first week at Hawkins seems to have flown by. Jane can barely keep track of anyone, and keeps getting the smallest of Mike's friends, Will Byers, name wrong. After the first few mistakes it's become a running joke, and she still cringes when she thinks about it. Fortunately, Will has a sense of humor and doesn't seem to mind.

Max has made it her personal mission to put distance between Mike and Jane, which she's simultaneously thankful for and irritated about. She doesn't want protection; she wants to trust herself. She sees the way Mike looks at her sometimes, longing in his dark eyes that Jane knows matches her own. She wants to be strong enough on her own, without Max Mayfield inserting herself like a buffer.

It's also kinda nice to have her best friend looking out for her, though. It's unexpected and reminds Jane so much of when they were younger and closer...

Tomorrow there will be no escaping him. Tomorrow, they're moving, and it won't just be Jane and her father. It's been a long time with just the two of them, and she's nervous what it will be like living with the Wheeler family. She hasn't had contact with her mother in years,

and it's been even longer than that since she's been a big sister. Not to mention, living with a guy she's hooked up with...

Why does it seem like her thoughts keep circling back to him? Jane chews her lip thoughtfully as her fingers skim through the bubbles. The past few days have been... good, she thinks. They haven't had anymore slip-ups, at least, which is certainly an improvement. Well, she knows it should be an improvement, but that didn't stop her from wanting and wondering.

All week long, she's done her best to avoid him. The only time they're alone together is on the drive to and from school, and after that first morning, Jane has come to learn a lot from those short minutes spent together. For instance, he is not a coffee drinker, not a fan of Debbie Gibson (she'd pointedly informed Max during PE that day, just to prove her wrong), and he was a courteous driver. Maybe too courteous, as he'd let so many people go ahead of them from the left turn lane that there hasn't been many parking spots and they'd nearly missed the bell for home room.

Jane found herself making notes in her head of all the things about him that she liked. His crooked smile when she said something amusing. The way he scrunched his nose at Dustin's obnoxious jokes. The way his hair curled over the collar of his endless supply of polo shirts. How he held the door for everyone, and how dark his eyes were when he stared at her when he didn't think she was paying attention.

Thursday morning had been one of those times, with the staring. She wore jeans and a Flashdance style, off the shoulder sweatshirt with her hair piled on top of her head, leaving her neck and collarbones exposed. As they'd driven to school, Jane could feel the intensity of his dark gaze burning her flesh. It left her warm and squirming.

How is she supposed to cope with this? It's not the first time she's wondered. Just ignore it, hope the feelings go away? If anything, not being allowed to indulge in them makes her want Mike more.

After a long time, when her fingers and toes are all pruned, Jane lets the water out and stands, wrapping a towel around her figure and trudging into her bare bedroom. Everything is stacked in boxes and

ready to go for the morning, when the moving van comes. A heavy stone of dread settles in her gut as she pulls on a pair of sweats and a tank top, crawling into bed and pulling the covers up to her chin.

Tomorrow, she thinks as she closes her eyes. Tomorrow I can worry about it.

As she drifts to sleep, Jane lets herself imagine Mike's hands ghosting over her legs and hips, lips skimming down her throat, eyes holding her gaze with unbridled passion and intensity...

—

"Thanks again," Hopper says as the boys shuffle into the living room. The sun is shining already, barely eight AM on a Saturday morning, and Mike is somehow wide awake in his soon-to-be stepfather's home. Boxes are everywhere, piled against the walls and labeled neatly in what Mike recognizes as Jane's handwriting. His stomach does the swoopy thing it's been doing lately whenever she comes up.

Calm down, he instructs his body. It's just her freaking / handwriting/.

"No problem, sir," Dustin chirps cheerfully. The promise of pizza was enough to drag him out of bed early on a weekend morning, and his insistence that if a party member was in need, it was their duty to help.

Mike didn't point out that Jane wasn't technically in the party yet. Having extra hands would make this go smoother.

Being that he wasn't the most in-shape guy in the world, Mike was dreading this whole thing. He didn't want to look weak in front of Jane or Jim, and he also wants to impress them. Mike is totally guilty of caring too much what other people think of him. In the case of the Hoppers, he /really/ wants them to like him.

However, his mother would also kill him if he didn't pitch in.

"Mike, go wake Janie up, would ya? Damn girl would sleep all day if I let her. Pink door, on the left." Hopper's tone is affectionate, and he winks. Why did he wink? Mike instantly flushed - does he know

something happened? Can he read minds? Does he know that Mike is already quite familiar with his daughter /and/ her bedroom?

"S-sure thing, sir," he says. He runs his hands through his hair and shuffles down the hall to her room. The door is cracked open. He hears Dustin and Lucas as Jim instructs them on which boxes to take first. Taking a steadying breath, Mike gently knocks and twists the knob.

"Jane? Uh, hey," he says, stepping into her room. It's much neater than the last time he was there. Everything packed away and labeled.

His eyes land on her form curled up under a quilt. Smiling despite himself, Mike takes a moment to drink in her beauty without her or anyone else knowing. He got enough crap from the guys all week long, claiming that he was giving her "heart eyes" and that it was "pathetic." Alone, he squats down to her level and lets himself observe.

Her lips are full though her mouth itself is small. There is a very slight smattering of freckles on her nose, and her dark eyelashes stand in stark contrast to the pale creamy color of her cheeks. A dark curl falls over her brow, and Mike's fingers twitch to brush it away. She is so damn beautiful, it nearly hurts.

A crash from the living room - definitely broken glass - and Dustin's yelp of "Sorry, Chief!" drags Mike from him staring and he puts a hand on her blanketed shoulder.

"Jane, wake up." He nudges her gently.

"Five more minutes," her raspy morning voice pleads.

Mike chuckles quietly. "Sorry. No can do." She harrumphs into her pillow before cracking one eyelid at him. Slowly, a smile curves her lips.

"Mike?"

"Good morning." He can't resist smiling back. In the soft morning light of her bedroom, just the two of them, it's so easy to forget everything else. No parents, no friends, just Mike and Jane and the

heat between them. It simmers, until she rolls into her back and stretches. Blanket slipping down, and he can see the small points of her nipples against the tank top she's wearing, and then Mike feels like someone cranked the heat too high. He knows he shouldn't look but it's impossible to tear his gaze away.

Mike gulps and Jane blushes. She pulls her blanket up.

"Sorry." He wishes the floor could swallow him whole.

"It's ok. But um," Jane frowns at him, "what are you doing here?"

"It's moving day. We got enlisted," Mike says. He stands up and awkwardly looks around, swinging his hands. "So uh, I'm just gonna, ya know..." he jerks his thumb towards the door and she smiles crookedly.

"I'll get dressed and meet you out there." Mike nods and practically runs to the living room where Lucas is holding a dust pan, and Dustin is sweeping shards of glass into it, while they bicker.

"You said you had it -"

"I said I /didn't/ have it! You never listen to me!" Dustin aggressively swipes the broom towards Lucas, a puff of dust or dirt flying into his face.

"If I didn't know better, I'd say you sound like an old married couple." Mike smirks at the pair.

"Oh, bite me," Dustin snaps. "What took you so long?"

Mike blushes but Jane interrupts them with a big yawn, followed closely with a "good morning," and surprised expression. She glances at Mike. "Did my dad enlist our whole grade?"

He's glad she's got on a loose sweatshirt and shapeless sweatpants. Mike doesn't need a reminder of what she looks like underneath.

"Look who's up!" Jim says. His grin is contagious - and somehow, even more intimidating.

"Yeah, yeah." Jane waves him off and disappears into the kitchen and returns with a mug of coffee. "How'd you suckers get roped into this?"

"Free pizza," Dustin says. Jane snorts.

"Hey kid," Jim says, "How about you grab one of these guys and get to work on your room? I'd like to be done by the time the Colts play." Jane rolls her eyes but nods. Mike has to fight to keep from eagerly volunteering. But she looks to him, one eyebrow quirked, and he's helpless to do anything but nod and follow her.

In companionable silence, they start to load boxes up together. It only takes a couple trips to the truck and back until they're left with one box, and he frowns at the messy script. /Sarah./

"Oh, I can get this one," Jane says quickly, her cheeks going pale as she grips the handle slots.

"Who is Sarah?" Mike asks. Curiosity getting the better of him - he can tell how uncomfortable she is as she holds the crate with white knuckles. Is it her mom? Is that why she's being weird?

"Um..." Jane chews her lip and he thinks he sees the shimmer of tears in her amber eyes but she blinks them away after a few beats, shaking her head. "Sarah was - she was -"

"It's ok," Mike says, lightly touching her shoulder which is tense as a piano wire. "You don't have to - um, I mean, unless you're comfortable." Wow, could he sound more like a dweeb?

"Sarah was my sister. She died," Jane says in a hushed voice.

His heart sinks into his stomach and Mike can barely contain his own sadness. How awful - as much as both of his sisters irritate him daily, he can't imagine life without them. "I'm really sorry," he says, and she softens a bit, giving him a weak smile that doesn't reach her eyes.

"It was a long time ago." She takes a shuddery breath and gestures with the box. "I'm just gonna... load this up." Before she can leave, Mike grips her shoulder a little tighter, a lot more meaning. He wants to be there for her, he wants to make her smile and give one of her sassy lines, but he doesn't know how to say all of that. It's more than

the fire that burns through his veins whenever he sees her, the way his lips tingle when he remembers their stolen moments together. Mike cares about her, more deeply than he intended, and seeing her upset... makes /him/ upset.

He is so screwed.

"If you ever need someone..."

"Thanks," she says before he can finish. Twisting slightly, rising to her tip-toes, Jane pecks his cheek and gives him a brittle grin.

So, so screwed.

6. Chapter 6

Chapter 6

Rain fell in heavy sheets in the darkness of the night. Jane's hands gripped the handlebars of her old bike, knuckles white as her feet slip against the pedals. If Max isn't dead - which has to be the reason she isn't answering the phone - she's going to /kill/ her.

She tells herself to calm down, but her heart still races in her chest and her cheeks are pink from exertion as well as shame and guilt. Will she ever change? Will she ever be able to keep her fucking legs shut?

She jumps the curb and ditches her bike in the yard, careless as she stumbles to the door. After knocking and shouting, she realizes the rain is coming down too hard to be heard. Trying the handle, she finds it unlocked, and ducks inside.

Jane has never been so thankful that the Hargrove-Mayfield house seems empty, or that it's raining - it's easy to pretend her face is wet from that, not tears. She hurried through the darkened hallway back to Max's room, thrusting the door open only to be met with...

Lucas. And Max. But, /Naked/.

His skin glows even darker compared to her dappled porcelain, and they're both in the throes of passion and don't even notice her standing there, one hand clutching the doorknob. Quietly, Jane tiptoes back and shuts the door. She should leave, go home and deal with this on her own... but that's where Mike is, and she doesn't think she can work out her issues when the biggest one is right there with her.

Collapsing onto the sofa, she decides to wait it out. She can't go home. Not after...

It isn't even her fault! She was taking a shower, innocently minding her own business, singing along to the radio perched on the bathroom counter. She didn't hear the door open. And... really, it's his

fault, because obviously she was using the shower and he didn't knock, just traipsed right in and threw open the curtain and there she was, in all her wet, naked, soapy glory.

"Mike!" She has gasped, trying in vain to cover herself, but he just stood there, staring, one hand on the shower curtain. Blinking, like he wasn't sure he was truly seeing what was in front of him.

"Jane-"

"Jeez, knock much? At all?" She was rude and snappy, but also naked and vulnerable, and once she stopped to glare at him - remembering that he had totally seen her without clothes, and touched her without clothes, so covering up was pointless - she felt the heat of his dark gaze sweep over her already heated skin. Heat piled low in her belly. She shivered under his watchful eyes, skin turning to an electric thing that buzzed for his touch.

And then he lunged, reaching for her, fingers sliding over her soap-slick flesh, and they were kissing. And then they were taking his damp clothes off, and he was stepping into the shower, and the curtain slid shut...

Oh, god, why is she like this? Why is she so weak? Helpless under his hypnotic gaze, longing for his touch no matter how much she tries to fight it. It's not fair, but Jane learned that a long time ago. When Sarah got sick - and she knew it should have been her. Her little sister was so sweet, so pure, and Jane already knew she had darkness in her heart. She felt it from a young age, the bad part of her that wanted to hurt things as much as she hurt, inside. She loved Sarah, she really did - but she hated her at the same time. Taking all the attention, taking away their parents' love. And then she got sick, and it was like Jane disappeared completely.

She wanted to be the sick one, not just because she didn't want Sarah to hurt but because she wanted them to care about her, too. She wanted them to worry about her, too. And she knew that she deserved it more than anyone. That she should have been the one to die.

Her chest aches from holding in sobs, and she quietly lets one slip

out. Her shoulders hunch up, and she curls in on herself. It's a landslide, they won't stop. Images of her past flicker through her mind like a film reel, the tubes and machines working to keep Sarah's frail body, so pale and tiny, alive. Different hands on her skin, some nice and some not. The note she found when her mother took off. Mike, crooked smile and soft lips. It's so much, it's too much, and she can't breathe as the tears streak down her cheeks.

She gasps for breath, one hand scrabbling over her throat, until the world fades to black and her thoughts finally cease.

—

"Do you hear something?"

Max rolls her eyes, continues tracing patterns on the broad, muscular sparse of Lucas' chest. They're both sweaty and flushed, riding the post-sex endorphins, and she thinks nothing could drag her away from him, from this. Nothing feels better, safer, more /right/ than this. Nuzzling her nose on his coffee-dark skin, she smiles.

"I hear your heart pounding," she teases. Lucas huffs out a laugh, rolls his eyes, and tightens his arm around her. The rain was so heavy that day, and the overcast sky so dark and turbulent. It's like the weather sensed her own emotions, how much she needed him. And then he had appeared, dripping wet and knocking on her window. They'd barely said hello before peeling their clothes off, lips crashing together, them falling onto her unmade bed.

That's part of why she loves him, Max thinks. Lucas just gets her, without her having to say anything.

They slip into a comfortable silence, kissing randomly and touching always, when Max definitely hears something. And then there's a thump, they both jump out of bed.

"What the fuck," Max hisses, tossing on a T-shirt and the shorts she'd had on before Lucas showed up. He's struggling into his wet clothes as Max cracks open the door - of her parents or Bill are home, and catch the two of them - she shudders at the thought.

"Stay," she orders, and Lucas gives her a quirked eyebrow - like he's dumb enough to invite trouble. She tiptoes into the hallway, sea-green eyes wide and worried, and nearly trips over Jane who is sprawled out on the floor in front of the sofa. Gasping, she drops to the floor and shakes Jane frantically.

"Lucas! I need you!" She leans over, searching for a pulse, which is steady beneath her fingers. She sighs in relief as her boyfriend crouches beside her.

"What the hell?" He frowns in confusion.

"Honestly, I have no idea - but let's get her off the floor." Carefully, Max takes her legs and Lucas grabs her under the arms, and they get her onto the couch. Max shakes her, calls out her name, and Lucas goes to the kitchen to grab a glass of water. He's never actually been in Max's kitchen - just her bedroom, once or twice the bathroom when it was an absolute emergency or no one was home - so it takes a moment to find their cups. When he returns to the sun living room, Max is on the verge of tears.

"Why won't she wake up?!"

Lucas, feeling only an ounce of regret, upends the cold water and splashes it on Jane's face. Like a switch flipped, she gasps awake and her dark eyes fly wide open, frantically farting around as she breathes hard.

"Jane? Are you ok?" Max's voice shakes as she helps her sit up. Lucas feels his heart clench, worrying over her as she worries over her friend.

"Yeah - I," She takes a deep, shuddery breath, "I couldn't breathe. I was having a panic attack. I'm so sorry." Jane can't meet either of their gazes, instead focusing on her fingers twisting together in her lap. "I um, I needed to talk to you. I'm sorry, for interrupting..."

"Hey, it's ok," Max soothes. She drops an arm around Jane's shoulder, hugging her into her side, and leans their heads together. "Naked Lucas makes me hyperventilate too." She winks at him, and his cheeks feel decidedly hot. But he smiles as Jane hiccups out a brittle

laugh.

"I should go. You guys, um... continue what you were doing..." Jane blushes crimson which makes Lucas wish the floor would swallow him right then and there. How much had she heard? Or did she / see/?

"No, it's ok," Lucas says. "I'll just see you at school, all right?" He loves the smile Max gives him, one soft and sweet and so full of everything he adores about her. He leans down, gives her a quick peck, and then heads back to her bedroom to slip on his shoes and climb out the window. The rain has let up, and he jams his hands in the pockets of his soggy jeans, glad she doesn't live too far from his home.

And, though he tries not to, Lucas wonders again about Jane Hopper. She seems so normal, most of the time. Sassy, just like his girl. But there's something about her, that he's seen a couple times now, that worries him. That fragile, broken look in her eyes. The way her smile looks like it's about to crack and turn into tears. The way she depends on Max during these freak-out episodes. He can sense something is wrong, something is off, but Lucas can't put his finger on it precisely.

He needs more evidence.

Trudging up his driveway, he vows to get to the bottom of this.

—

Mike is laying on the sofa in the basement, trying to read *The Hobbit* again, but his thoughts keep straying. His stomach feels like the dryer on tumblr, by in a good way, and he keeps catching himself smiling. He knows he's supposed to feel badly, guilty or something, but he doesn't. Like, at all. Instead, he keeps thinking of how right it felt, his body pressed flush against Jane as the hot water beat over them.

Sure, she's going to be his stepsister in a matter of months. But he can't find it in himself to care - Jane is perfect. She's sassy, and she's sweet, and she's like no one he's ever met before. Mike can't describe the pull he feels towards her, like a magnet, like something he can't control.

He hasn't been paying attention that morning. It was habit - just head into the bathroom, take a leak, start the shower. But when he heard her voice, light and pretty, singing along to the radio, it all sort of hit him.

She was naked, the thin shower curtain between them, and he has no idea /what/ possessed him to throw it open but he wasn't disappointed. All of that creamy, pale skin, curly hair plastered to her back, soap suds sliding down her belly as legs... he saw her lips move but didn't understand what she'd said. All he could think about was kissing her.

So he did.

And sex with Jane was just as amazing the second time around.

His body reacts to the thoughts, and Mike groans in frustration. It's impossible to live with her, to be around her always, without this happening. He doesn't want it to stop - he can't make himself stop.

He doesn't want to stop.

He flushed at the memory of her taste, how she felt under his fingertips. The way she whimpered, and moaned, and trembled. Every moment that they share feels perfect. Like he was made to hold her, like she was made to fit into his arms just right.

He's going to tell her, Mike decides. How can he not tell her? Every time he looks at her, his heart pounds and his palms get clammy and he wants nothing more than to touch her. Smell her. He's pathetically in love with her, completely head over heels. He wants her, more than just her body. All of her.

Tossing his book aside, and starts pacing. It's how he thinks best. Mike's mind is a kaleidoscope of possibilities, but there is one thing he's certain of, with every beat of his heart.

Mike loves Jane. And he'll do whatever it takes to be with her.